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RUEPGEA/CDR650THMIGP SHAPE BE PRIORITY  
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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 03 PRISTINA 000240

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KV](#) [UNMIK](#)  
SUBJECT: KOSOVO: SERBS ENTHUSIASTIC BUT STILL CONFUSED  
AHEAD OF MAY 11 ELECTIONS

Classified By: CDA Tina S. Kaidanow for Reasons 1.4 (b), (d).

¶1. (C) Summary. Across the political spectrum, Kosovo Serbs are looking forward to the upcoming May 11 Serbian elections, despite the uncertainty surrounding the outcome. Nationalist parties are better-organized and have more support among Kosovo Serbs than the "pro-European" bloc. Nevertheless, some of the latter may prevail at the local level due to personal contacts in their communities, which will play a key role in voting in small, isolated Serb enclaves. There is still confusion over what the local elections winners will be able to do with their victories, although we are informed that the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo's Coordination Center (CCK) may name municipal coordinators based on the election results. Some Kosovo Serb leaders, such as members of the Serb National Council (SNC) Gracanica and the Independent Liberal Party (SLS), are feeling vulnerable, as their leadership bona fides have never been put to a genuine electoral test, and they fear losing what legitimacy they have after the elections. We will work to reassure the SLS and other Serbs in the government that they have a vital role to play. There is, however, no denying two key facts about these elections: 1) expected heavy turnout will yield leaders, whoever they may be, with some legitimacy among Serbs and 2) whoever controls the Serbian government after May 11 will continue to exercise decisive influence over Kosovo Serbs. End Summary.

#### Enthusiasm for Voting

¶2. (C) Despite misgivings about the organization of local elections and the potential for manipulation, Kosovo Serbs of all political persuasions are enthusiastic about the May 11 parallel Serbian municipal elections being held (illegally) in Kosovo. Vesna Jovanovic, a former Kosovo MP from Partes (Gjilan/Gnjilane municipality) and who remains a constructive interlocutor for the international community, has enthusiastically joined Serbian Economy Minister Mladjan Dinkic's G17 Plus party on its local election list in southeastern Kosovo. The list is headed by G17's Dragan Nikolic (who serves as regional coordinator for the Serbian Government's Coordination Center for Kosovo (CCK)). Srdjan Vasic, a former CCK official (and member of the Socialist Party (SPS)) explained May 6 that the overwhelming need for

"legitimate" representation has overcome any fear of manipulation. In line with this, we have been told from all sides that turnout in Kosovo will be very high on May 11.

DSS, SRS best placed

13. (C) Agreeing with another generally-accepted belief, on May 6, International Crisis Group (ICG) analyst Srdjan Djeretic said that Serbian Prime Minister Kostunica's Democratic Party of Serbia (DSS) is the best-organized in Kosovo; Djeretic and many other observers, including members of the G17 and Serbian President Boris Tadic's Democratic Party (DS), all expect the DSS to do well, especially in Serb-majority northern Kosovo, where the DSS network of activists, led by Marko Jaksic, is very strong. Given Kosovo Serb voting patterns in the February 2008 Serbian presidential elections, there is also good reason to expect that Serbs will vote heavily for the Radical Party (SRS), along with the DSS.

Personal Politics Key

14. (C) Both Djeretic and Nikolic (who we met May 8) underscored, however, that personal contacts are very decisive in local elections, especially in small, tightly-knit enclaves in southern Kosovo. Many candidates from parties that do not poll well among Kosovo Serbs in parliamentary or presidential elections - such as the DS and G17 - may do well at the local level. As an illustration of this, Nikolic and Jovanovic appeared May 8 on TV Puls, a local Serb station in the Gjilan/Gnjilane area, to promote the G17 list in the region. Both believe their personal connections in the community will ensure G17's victory there,

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despite the party's low standing overall with Kosovo Serbs.

Confusion Prevails

15. (C) Apart from political analysts and candidates, Kosovo Serbs are confused about local elections. Former Kosovo MP Randjel Nojkic, along with Dragan Velic, a member of the Serb National Council (SNC) Gracanica, and Dejan Jevtic, the manager of Radio Gracanica, told us May 6 that it is not clear at all to the general public who is running and on what platform at the local level. It is also unclear what powers any of these elected officials might have once "in office." In Gracanica itself, regional CCK coordinator Goran Arsic (DS) is apparently running on both the local DS list and on his own "citizen's initiative" list to maximize his chances of getting on the municipal council.

CCK Transition

16. (C) While precise mandates and authority are hard to determine at this time, the winners of the municipal elections are likely to have better access to Serbian institutions. We were told by both Nikolic and Arsic that the CCK will be reorganized after the elections, leaving five regional coordinator positions to be filled through appointments made by the Serbian Ministry for Kosovo, but allowing the municipality jobs to be determined by the election results.

"Old Guard," SLS, Nervous

17. (C) Some prominent Kosovo Serbs who have stayed out of the electoral fray may fear that the elections will sweep aside their self-declared status as leaders of the local community, especially since their leadership has never been put to any electoral test. Two senior members of SNC Gracanica - Rada Trajkovic, director of the Gracanica Health Center, along with Dragan Velic - have told us and other international interlocutors that Belgrade's interference in Kosovo, in particular the holding of local elections, is unhelpful. Velic bemoaned that fact that the "Crisis Board," a group of Gracanica politicians, policemen, and CCK

officials formed after February 17 to help guide affairs there, has now fallen apart due to the political campaign. Trajkovic received Serbian Minister of Defense Dragan Sutanovac (DS) in her health center on May 5, and readouts we received on the meeting from UNMIK and other Serb sources indicate that popular support for Trajkovic - who ordered her employees to turn out to greet him - is low. The ICG's Djeric, along with Jevtic and many other self-described "nonaligned" observers, thinks that Serb leaders like Trajkovic and Velic have lost whatever credibility they once had and could fade from the scene after the elections.

18. (C) Serbs in the Kosovo institutions, led by the Independent Liberal Party (SLS), are also nervous. Over the past few weeks we have received numerous complaints from SLS members of the government and Assembly that they are under threat from hardline elements in Gracanica and elsewhere. Slobodan Petrovic, leader of the SLS party, has on several occasions told us he is concerned about being "bypassed" by the international community after May 11 in favor of new interlocutors elected by a large number of Kosovo Serbs. As with the "old guard," Djeric agrees with the widespread perception among Kosovo Serbs that the SLS and other Serbs in the institutions will be viewed as at best irrelevant and at worst traitors to Serbia.

Comment: Belgrade Still Key

19. (C) Despite their internal divisions, sharpened by the election campaign, Kosovo Serbs agree that whoever controls power in Belgrade will have a decisive amount of influence over the fate of Serbs in Kosovo. Looking ahead to the election results, more democratically-oriented Kosovo Serb politicians hope for a DS-led government in Belgrade, which

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they think would help them exert influence over the DSS/SRS-leaning Kosovo Serbs. Some hope openly for such a government to finally deal with the hardliners in the north.

110. (C) On the local level, we expect that the DSS and SRS will likely do well, which would position them to play a significant - and probably unhelpful - role on the ground in Kosovo no matter who controls the next government of Serbia. If, as expected, Kosovo Serb turnout on May 11 is high, we can assume that those elected will have at least some legitimacy in their communities. While this will present us, the Kosovo authorities and UNMIK with the challenge of dealing with the election aftermath, it may also enable us to determine who among the local Serbs can claim to be genuine leaders. Depending on the outcomes, and assuming that there is some openness to contacts with the international community, we will judge how we might reach out to some of these new leaders and coordinate the effort with other stakeholders, including UNMIK, OSCE, and ICO. End Comment.  
KAIDANOW